



## State Representative **Val Ogden**



# A Report to the 49th Legislative District

January 1998

Dear Neighbor:

The Legislature went back to work this month for a 60-day session in which discussions will no doubt cover a wide range of issues. Thank you for reviewing this report on topics that will take most of my time and attention this year.

Please don't hesitate to get in touch with me with your own ideas and thoughts on these and other issues.

My Vancouver phone number, 254-3007, will connect you with my legislative assistant, Clareda Nikula, in Olympia. We will do our best to assist you. You can also use the toll-free Legislative Hotline at 1-800-562-6000 to leave messages for the governor and for any legislator.

Sincerely,

*Val Ogden*  
Val Ogden

State Representative  
49th Legislative District

### **Olympia address and phone number:**

342 John L. O'Brien Bldg.  
PO Box 40600  
Olympia, WA 98504-0600  
(360) 786-7872  
e-mail: ogden\_va@leg.wa.gov

**Toll-free Hotline:** 1-800-562-6000

**TDD (for hearing-impaired):** 1-800-635-9993

### **Committee assignments:**

Capital Budget, *Ranking minority member*  
Transportation Policy & Budget  
Rules  
Pension Policy  
Joint Legislative Audit & Review  
Salmon Restoration Task Force

## ✓ **Budget:**

### **We have a significant surplus, let's use it wisely**

It's anticipated that our state will continue enjoying a budget surplus of approximately \$860 million. (Most other states would be very envious of our budget "problem.") Proposals on the drawing board would have the Legislature:

- ◆ Provide more tax breaks for individuals and/or businesses.
- ◆ Put the surplus away for a rainy day.
- ◆ Relieve the tax burden on local governments.
- ◆ Exempt \$2,500 from the vehicle-excise tax for every car and truck.
- ◆ Invest more money in such programs such as education, worker retraining, basic-health insurance, and transportation.
- ◆ A combination of these ideas.

I agree with the governor's suggestion that we should use at least a portion of the surplus to take care of some responsibilities that have fallen through the cracks in recent years and to have a sensible reserve.

## ✓ **Contractors:**

### **Rules and regulations needed to serve and protect consumers**

I hosted a Vancouver meeting in December at which dozens of citizens reported problems and nightmares they have had with some contractors. Appalling and outrageous acts of criminal behavior were told to me and to other legislators who joined me at the meeting.

To be sure, most contractors operate fairly and aboveboard. As we work toward more protection for consumers, we must be balanced and fair and not hurt the legitimate contractors in large and small companies. Some of the ideas suggested at the public meeting will be incorporated in a bill and then be taken up in committee and, hopefully, floor discussion this year.

# State Representative Val Ogden

Some issues to be considered include:

- ◆ Inspector training. Should inspectors be looking at the quality of building construction as well as the adherence to building code? This is a question that will surely come up as we develop legislation.
- ◆ Licensing requirements. Contractors would be required to have training and education and be tested to be licensed.
- ◆ Contractor records. Illicit contractors often escape accountability by filing for protection under our rather lenient bankruptcy laws. They then may be back in business under some other name. Many people believe that potential customers should be able to find out the history of a contractor with whom they might be about to do business.
- ◆ Arbitration. Another citizen at the meeting suggested that our state provide arbitration in cases where customers and contractors are having an argument.
- ◆ Lien laws. We will consider the idea of providing better protection for home owners in dealing with subcontractors and general contractors.
- ◆ Bond. This requirement would increase on a sliding scale.

## ✓ Schools:

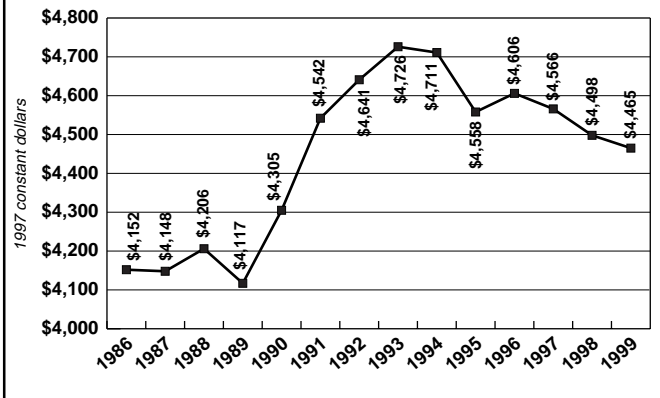
### Let's agree that education is the state's paramount duty

It is a cliché, I admit, but it's nevertheless true that our children are our future. We have an obligation to make sure our schools have the proper resources for educating the young people of Washington. Hopefully, the majority Republican Party will accept responsibility for maintaining an appropriate level of support for our public schools.

The trend in recent years, however, has been in the opposite direction. Taking inflation into account, current school funding is down \$68 per student from last year. Next year's funding will drop by \$101 per student – that's \$261 less than we were investing in 1993. With the huge state-revenue surplus, I think this is a very good time to strengthen school funding and ease some of the local property-tax pressure.

Another important (but sad) factor to keep in mind is that only three states have classrooms that are more crowded than ours here in Washington. How can we expect kids to learn anything well if they don't have enough one-on-one contact with their teachers?

### SCHOOL SPENDING PER PUPIL HAS BEEN STAGNANT OR DROPPING SINCE 1993



## ✓ Transportation:

### Crowded roadways must get our attention in the Legislature

No one knows better than the citizens of Vancouver and the rest of Clark County what a nightmare it's getting to be on the roads of our state. It's unacceptable not just that gridlock has become the norm, but also that our highways are rapidly deteriorating. We must work toward expanded highway capacity and improved roadway safety. This has been identified as a top priority by our chamber of commerce, by the governments of Clark County and the city of Vancouver, and by the Identity Clark County organization.

My special newsletter a few months ago discussed transportation issues at great length. These issues haven't gone away — they won't go away until the Legislature resolves to do something about the situation. As I said in the fall newsletter, it's unlikely that a serious discussion of a gas-tax increase to fund highway improvements will be taken up in this legislative session, although it is one of the best proposals and one that has been advanced by the governor. Unfortunately, too many legislators are putting politics ahead of the realities of our transportation mess.

Our problem — our challenge — is that crowded highways, which obviously cause traffic congestion for motorists, also mean that the ports are stuck at a competitive disadvantage with others on the West Coast because it takes so much longer to move goods on our highways. Further, as I noted above, our roads and highways are deteriorating. Finally, we must also address the growing menace of "road rage." I hope this legislative session will see serious discussion of methods for dealing with this increasing — and dangerous — phenomenon.

# A Report to the 49th Legislative District

## ✓ Health care:

### Adequate funding is imperative for the survival of working families

The state's Basic Health Plan (BHP) provides insurance for thousands of Washington citizens who wouldn't otherwise receive even a minimum amount of health care. I believe that we should continue to expand the program so that more families can be served.

Efforts have been successful in the last few years to eliminate progress passed in health-care reform. Our Republican colleagues committed to providing funding for 200,000 enrollees by mid-1997. This did not happen. And, although we requested at least 20,000 new enrollment openings, only 8,000 openings were funded in the budget. Medical inflation has made the situation even worse. Thousands of Washington families remain uninsured. Working to provide more BHP openings remains the highest health-care priority for me.

## ✓ Drunken driving:

### Tougher penalties for inebriated motorists are on the front burner

People who mix alcohol and other drugs with their driving cause so much tragedy in the lives of their innocent fellow motorists and passengers. The governor has come out with proposals that clamp down on drunken driving, and I expect these to be among the first bills debated this year. Here are the main recommendations outlined in the governor's plan:

- ◆ A lower blood-alcohol level for establishing the crime of driving under the influence. The standard would be lowered from .10 percent to .08 percent.
- ◆ An automatic license suspension and impoundment of vehicles.
- ◆ A restriction on the use of deferred prosecution.

While I support the governor's proposal, I must say that I am concerned that this may be another unfunded mandate for our cities and counties. If the bill is passed, we need to provide the money for local governments to carry out its provisions.

## ✓ Salmon restoration:

### Avoiding a federal takeover in fish-run recovery must be top priority

The once-huge fish runs in the Columbia River and other Pacific Northwest waters have dwindled unacceptably low.

Salmon runs are in danger of extinction and our authority to manage our own state's resources could be overridden by the federal government under the Endangered Species Act.

As a member of the Salmon Restoration Task Force, which held meeting over the state this summer and fall, I have been very involved in developing a recovery plan. We legislative Democrats submitted our recommendations in December, and I remain optimistic that we can convince the other legislators to embrace our position. I believe that our goal can only be met if we:

- ◆ Rely principally on locally developed recovery efforts that meet state and federal standards.
- ◆ Guarantee that everyone who is part of the problem is also part of the solution.
- ◆ Tailor solutions to the unique needs of specific regions. With respect to the unique circumstances of the Columbia River, for instance, a successful salmon-recovery plan must consider the interest of all the multiple users of the river.
- ◆ Identify the appropriate role of the Bonneville Power Administration.
- ◆ Develop a comprehensive river-basin-management plan for the Columbia River.



*I am always very happy to welcome visitors to the state capital during legislative sessions. Citizens should always feel free to drop by and take a firsthand look at the process.*

- ◆ Conduct a census of commercial fishers to determine the current level of economic distress, as well as the potential impacts of further environmental and governmental disruption.
- ◆ Determine the carrying capacity of the Columbia River.

## ✓ **Economic security:**

### **Citizens have a right to expect a fair wage and basic benefits**

The minimum wage here in Washington right now is \$5.15 an hour, which is the lowest on the West Coast. House Democrats this year will again work toward raising the minimum wage so that people can take home a livable paycheck. We believe the minimum wage should be at least \$6.50 an hour.

While our state and national unemployment rates remain at record low levels, hundreds of part-time and temporary workers are struggling to make ends meet; many of them don't receive even the most basic on-the-job benefits.

We believe business should be encouraged to provide benefits for all part-time and temporary workers on a pro rata basis. Emergency and family leave, for instance, should be guaranteed so that workers don't lose their jobs when they have to take time away for a long-term medical emergency.

## ✓ **Insurance bias:**

### **Halting discrimination against the victims of domestic violence**

Between two million and four million women are victims of domestic violence every year in this country. These women account for nearly a third of the visits by women to hospital emergency rooms, and 1.4 million doctor visits every year. Sadly, a recent national report says they're being victimized twice! Half of the nation's largest insurance companies, according to the report, use domestic violence as a reason to deny coverage to victims or hike the victims' coverage rates.

A fairly new federal law does prohibit insurance companies from denying health coverage based on domestic abuse. Some insurers, however, get around the law by simply charging very high rates. Further, this federal law doesn't stop insurance carriers from denying other types of coverage.

A bill was introduced in the 1997 session to guarantee equal access to insurance for all Washington citizens. The legislation would prohibit insurance firms from denying coverage, increasing premium rates charged to domestic-violence victims, or either requesting or disclosing personal information about domestic violence. Unfortunately, this measure never even received a committee hearing last year! We will continue working for it this year.